DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 173 302 SP 014 116

AUTHOR Janesick, Valerie J.
TITLE An Ethnographic Study of a Teacher's Classroom Perspective: Implications for Curriculum.
INSTITUTION Michigan State Univ., East Lansing. Inst. for Research on Teaching.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 79
NOTE 32p.
AVAILABLE FROM Institute for Research on Teaching, 252 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48823 ($2.25)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Management; Classroom Environment; *Group Dynamics; Interpersonal Relationship; *Leadership Qualities; *Role Models; Student Behavior; *Student Teacher Relationship; *Teacher Behavior; Teaching Styles

ABSTRACT

A profile of a male sixth-grade teacher is presented with the objective of demonstrating how his perception of his class determined his decision making and leadership style. The teacher was observed over a full school year. This teacher perceived his class as a cohesive, interacting group and he, as its leader, demonstrated the behaviors he wished his students to model. The result of this teacher's perspective was a class with a strong sense of unity. The classroom curriculum was group-centered and carried out by the group, with the teacher as leader. Outside intervention by the principal or other staff members and directives from parents had little or no effect on the classroom curriculum. The reported observation of this teacher lends support to the notion that teaching remains an individual enterprise dealing with present-oriented situations in the classroom. In this case, the teacher's classroom perspective was, essentially, the curriculum of the classroom. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Valerie Janesick
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED173302

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

An Ethnographic Study of a Teacher's Classroom Perspective:[1] Implications for Curriculum

Valerie J. Janesick[2]

By entering a teacher's world and staying there for an extended period of time, it is possible to gain an understanding of how the teacher interprets, makes decisions about, and acts in that world. As teachers define their world, make decisions about it, and act in it, they develop a classroom perspective, which is an ordered view of the classroom world.

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the classroom perspective of one elementary sixth-grade school teacher in an urban classroom. It was necessary to isolate conceptually that perspective to understand (1) the teacher's interpretive process, (2) his decisions, and (3) his actions. This study was guided, therefore, by the following exploratory questions.

1. What elements constitute the teacher's classroom perspective?

---

[1]This paper is a summary of a dissertation, "An Ethnographic Study of a Teacher's Classroom Perspective," submitted to Michigan State University, 1977.

[2]Valerie J. Janesick, a former Institute for Research on Teaching intern and staff member, is currently an assistant professor of education at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, California.

SP 014 716

2. Which contextual variables inside and outside the classroom influence the classroom perspective?

3. What are the assumptions that the teacher makes about students, learning, and classrooms which support his classroom perspective?

4. How does the teacher synthesize the various types of information about student behavior and background into his perspective?

Background and Conceptual Framework

The study was based upon the theory of symbolic interaction. Blumer (1967) and Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds (1975) characterize symbolic interaction as a process of interpretation. As people encounter elements in their environment, they interpret and give meaning to them. Individuals judge whether these elements are suitable to their actions and make decisions on the basis of the judgment. They then construct the actions of their "self" according to the decision. Blumer notes an important implication of this approach:

> Whatever the action in which he is engaged, the individual proceeds by pointing out to himself the divergent things which have to be taken into account in the course of his action. He has to note what he wants to do and how he is to do it; he has to take account of the demands, the expectations, the prohibitions, and the threats as they may arise in the situation in which he is acting. His action is built up step by step through a process of such self-indication. The human individual pieces together and guides his action by taking account of different things and interpreting their significance for his prospective action. (p. 141)

The significance of making indications to oneself is that the process is distinct from the conventional psychological states and is not subsumed under them. As Blumer

points out:

> Self-indication is a moving communicative process in which the individual notes things, assesses them, gives them a meaning, and decides to act on the basis of the meaning. Environmental pressures, external stimuli, organic drives, wishes, attitudes, feelings, ideas, and their like do not cover or explain the process of self-indication. The process of self-indication stands over against them in that the individual points out to himself and interprets the appearance or expression of such things, noting a given social demand that is made on him. (p. 142)

By means of self-indication, then, the individual places him/herself against his self-indications, whatever they may be, and then either accepts, rejects, or transforms them depending on his or her definition of the situation.

Few dispute W.I. Thomas' observation that what a person does depends on his or her definition of the situation. Shibutani (1967) has stated that the manner in which an individual consistently defines a succession of the situations depends on his or her perspective. He sees a perspective as

> An ordered view of one's world -- what is taken for granted about the attributes of various objects, events, and human nature. It is an order of things remembered and things expected as well as things actually perceived, an organized conception of what is plausible and what is possible; it constitutes the matrix through which one perceives his environment. The fact that men have such ordered perspectives enables them to conceive of their ever changing world as relatively stable, orderly, and predictable. As Reizler puts it, one's perspective is an outline scheme, which running ahead of experience, defines and guides it. (p. 161)

Thus, for the interactionist, a perspective is a reflective socially derived interpretation of that which he or she encounters, an interpretation which serves as a basis for the actions which he or she constructs. The person's perspective is a combination of beliefs and behaviors continually modified by social interaction.

In the classroom, the teacher acts and thinks in a particular way. In the terms of the interactionist, the teacher develops a *classroom perspective*, a consistent way of thinking and acting in a classroom. That perspective enables the teacher to make sense of his or her world, to interpret it, and to construct his or her actions within it.

The tenets of symbolic interaction dictate that to understand the subject's world, the researcher must catch this process of interpretation. A suitable way of accomplishing this is to accompany the subject as he or she encounters and interprets events and constructs social reality. Accordingly, in this study, I placed myself in the teacher's environment, took a limited role in many classroom activities, and observed the teacher from as many vantage points as possible. I was not a participant observer in the conventional sense, because I did not actually take the role of teacher; rather, I was an observer of the teacher and participant in myriad professional activities in which he was central.

Procedure

The actions of the teacher were described and explained during seven months of field work. I observed the teacher in his classroom and in other settings within the school. In addition, I had the opportunity to observe the teacher in other schools within the district; he had a part time role as a "helping teacher," traveling to various schools to assist fellow teachers in instruction at their request. The teacher was also asked, on occasion, to conduct workshops for intern teachers, affording me still another observation opportunity. Furthermore, drama activities were of particular interest to this teacher, so I was able to visit yet another school in the district during a tour of the sixth-grade Christmas play.

I participated in the physical, social, and academic activities of the classroom, such as field trips, parties, art lessons, and reading. I took extensive notes on the action and statements of the teacher and conducted interviews with him. These notes and transcripts of the interviews were analyzed on a weekly basis to help me discover patterns, relationships, and indices of behavior which would merit further study. As the analyses proceded, concepts were inferred from the data and hypotheses were generated. Through interviews with the teacher and key informants in the classroom, the validity of the inferences was tested. In sum,

these procedures gave me a proximity to the social situation of the classroom and enabled me to catch the teacher's process of interpretation.

Significance of the Study

Although much research on teaching has concentrated on how teachers act and perform, another approach has also emerged, one which emphasizes teachers' cognitive processes. In this approach, the teacher is seen as a kind of clinician, actively processing information from many sources and synthesizing that information in terms of some manageable model; this enables the teacher to render judgments and make decisions. The cognitive-process approach is based on the work of Newell, Shaw, and Simon (1958). As interpreted by Shulman (1974), this view suggests that the teacher is responsible for:

> aggregating and making sense of an incredible diversity of information sources about individual students and the class collectively; bringing to bear a growing body of empirical and theoretical work constituting research literature of education; somehow combining all that information with the teacher's own experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and purposes; and having to respond, make judgments, render decisions and reflect and regroup to begin again. (p. 321)

Although the information-processing approach provides a heuristic tool for viewing what is involved in teaching, it is limited because it does not disclose why a teacher chooses to process one particular set of decisions rather than another. And yet, by uncovering the teacher's

classroom perspective, it is easier to understand the teacher's choice of a set of decisions. There is a point at which the usefulness of information processing stops and it becomes necessary to find another tool, one which will indicate the grounds for the teacher's choice of a particular set of decisions.

In this study, the social psychology of symbolic interaction served as the heuristic tool for filling in what information processing was unable to supply. Thorough descriptive data, gathered in the teacher's world while he was in the process of interpreting that world, help reveal the structure of his decisions.

The significance of the study is twofold. First, the research contributes to a need for descriptive data on teaching; the descriptive record of what the teacher says and does helps uncover the structure behind the statements and actions, and, as such, might be useful to teachers, administrators, and teacher educators. Second, from a methodological standpoint, the study may demonstrate the utility of ethnographic approaches, such as participant observation, for educational research. Because the ethnographic method enables one to get at how the teacher thinks and acts in the classroom, scholars conducting information-processing studies might find it helpful.

Elements of both information-processing and symbolic-

interaction theories are combined in the study reported here. There are elements common to both theories. Both hold that the study of teaching must take into account (1) the goals of the teacher in a given setting, and (2) the characteristics of the task environment or the context variables that set limits to alternatives available at a given time. Where the two theories do not agree can be seen in this explanation of the information-processing schema, offered by Newell (Newell & Simon, 1972):

> There is a sort of symbolic formula we use in information-processing psychology. To predict a subject you must know: (1) his goals, (2) the structure of the task environments, and (3) the invariant structure of his processing mechanisms. (p. 42)

The symbolic interactionist would not claim that an invariant structure is part of interpretation or even part of social reality. Thomas' definition of the situation illustrates the invariance involved in a given social context. Although a person may define a situation fairly consistently over time, his or her perspective is variable and dynamic because of constantly changing interpretations of given events. The process of self-indication is, by definition, variant.

The significance of this study may extend, then, into the elaboration of some type of theoretical development by complementary and supplementary uses of the frameworks of information processing and symbolic interaction. Although the findings of the study relate only to one teacher's

classroom perspective, the uniqueness of this teacher's perspective makes the findings valuable. As educators seek to improve educational practice, more information will be needed about teachers and their classroom perspectives. This research was designed, in part, to meet that need.

Results

The Teacher's Perspective

The case study revealed that the teacher's classroom perspective was characterized by a concern for creating, maintaining, and restoring a group. When the group functioned smoothly, instruction, management, and activities proceeded smoothly. From the beginning of the school year, the teacher explained, he gradually worked at "building a rapport and a sense of working together."

I entered the classroom in November and remained until the end of May, making short visits to the site in June. Observation and interviews confimed that from November through January a stable and cohesive group was maintaining itself. The reward system, consensus level, norms of behaving, and leadership allowed the group to attain its goals of respect, cooperation, and completion of daily assignments.

At one point, however, it became necessary for the teacher to leave the class for half the day, for eight weeks. The system became unbalanced. Students altered their behavior

because they felt they had been rejected by the teacher, and the group displayed instability. To restore the group to its optimum level of stability and cohesiveness, the teacher worked with the group on projects and activities which demanded group consensus and cooperation, and required that the members work together. The teacher either allotted additional time for these activities or combined a number of subjects to make time blocks available. At the same time, the teacher rebuilt his rapport with the students by interacting with them as individuals and as group members. He used humor and the language of the students to accomplish this. Furthermore, as the leader of the group, he modeled the behaviors which facilitated the building of norms that brought consensus back to the group. Throughout this process, he encouraged respect for each group member, including himself.

Elements of the Perspective

Concern for maintaining a sense of groupness. The teacher was able to develop a group by creating the components of group life. He (1) designed and planned a number of activities which provided the students with rewards they enjoyed; (2) planned, organized, and provided group activities which generated a high level of group consensus; (3) assisted in developing norms for behavior, which allowed students

a great deal of freedom (provided they took responsibility for their actions) and gave him flexibility in his teaching role by enabling him to coordinate many class activities at one time; (4) provided leadership in the group, thereby enabling the group to perform certain tasks within a maintenance system sustained by the students; and (5) as leader, modeled behaviors which represented the major classroom goals of respect and cooperation. These elements, in combination, sustained the life of the group during the school year, in the best and worst moments. Each of the elements reflected the teacher's classroom perspective.

The teacher's perspective was recognizable through three phases of group development over the course of the study. The first phase occurred from November to January, when group consensus was high. The students were a stable and cohesive group. The norms of behavior -- which included (1) listening to the teacher when he spoke, (2) attending to one's work, and (3) working together as a group -- were followed consistently. Rewards for the students included participation in the Christmas play and regular group-centered activities such as art or music. During this phase, the teacher was clearly the leader of the group. The leadership he provided contributed to the group's stability and cohesiveness.

The second phase of group development came between January and March when the teacher removed himself from the

class on a half-time basis. A substitute teacher was brought in to replace him, giving the group two leader figures. The system of norms governing group behavior was altered, and the reward system was less effective, for the students did not receive from the substitute what they had received from their regular teacher. Group consensus was not as high as it had been when the teacher was in class full time. As a result, the teacher, the substitute, and the students experienced frustration. The group was less stable during this eight-week period than at any other time during the year. Given these circumstances, it became important that the group's cohesiveness and stability be restored to its previous level. Consequently, the teacher proceeded to plan the next part of the year with the purpose of "bringing the group together again."

This rebuilding effort took place during the third distinct phase of group development, between March and June. At the beginning of March, the teacher returned to the classroom on a full-time basis. Upon his return, he immediately reintroduced the students to the concept of "working together." He devoted the first part of the morning to creative drama, which gave the students the opportunity to undertake a major group endeavor. The students responded enthusiastically and the group began to regain equilibrium.

In addition, a number of other carefully-planned projects

were initiated by the teacher, with student collaboration. Through these projects, the group continued to move toward unity and regained a high level of consensus. Leadership was clearly provided for the group. Furthermore, the norms of the class began operating again, and the rewards of participation in the various group activities further contributed to a high level of consensus. Once this strong sense of groupness was restored, the everyday events of life in the classroom proceeded smoothly again; the teacher was able to instruct, manage the class, and coordinate many activities simultaneously.

Respect and cooperation: Major goals. The second element of the teacher's perspective can be characterized as a focus on respect and cooperation as major classroom goals. The respect theme was evident throughout the curriculum; instruction, class projects, and recess activities were all designed to promote respect and cooperation among group members.

The development of a high level of group consensus was the primary means by which the teacher sought to attain these goals. He established consensus by (1) providing rewards for the group, (2) developing norms of behavior, (3) providing leadership for the group, and (4) providing tasks in the form of specific activities and projects which

kept the group working together. The group activities planned such as a popcorn ball factory, a Mexican fiesta, and the Christmas play, were punctuated with the themes of respect and cooperation. The teacher's words and actions related these goals to the students. The students themselves used the words "respect" and "cooperation" in their everyday vocabulary, and the teacher modeled behaviors which conveyed these concepts.

Ultimately, by getting the class to function as a stable and cohesive unit, the teacher *was* able to establish respect and cooperation, as well as to achieve his traditional instructional goals. Thus the two elements of the teacher's perspective, concern for maintaining a strong sense of groupness and a focus on goals of respect and cooperation, were inter-related and complementary.

Planning and organizing the day. The third element of the teacher's perspective can be described as a concern for systematic planning and organization of the many daily events. The teacher planned all lessons and activities for the students, even those which were carried out by the teacher aide and intern teacher. He held a meeting each morning with the aide and the intern to review carefully what would occur during the day. Planning focused on group-oriented activities to be conducted in conjunction with

instruction so as to reinforce the major goals of respect and cooperation on a daily basis. The teacher wrote out the plans, communicated them to his aide, the intern, and the students, and adjusted them to deal with unpredictable events as they occurred. He reported spending many hours out of school planning projects, field trips, and instruction.

The teacher as leader. The fourth element of the teacher's classroom perspective has to do with leadership. As the clearly defined leader of the group, the teacher was able to coordinate and provide activities which reinforced the concepts of respect and cooperation. In addition, he modeled behaviors which represented these goals.

Effective groups function well with effective leaders. In this study, the teacher behaved as a leader in the manner outlined by Homans (1950):

1. The leader maintains his own position
2. The leader lives up to the norms of his group.
3. The leader leads.
4. The leader does not give orders that will not be obeyed.
5. In giving orders, the leader uses established channels.
6. The leader does not thrust himself upon his followers on social occasions.
7. The leader neither blames nor, in general, praises a member of his group before other members.

8. The leader takes into consideration the total situations.

9. In maintaining discipline, the leader is less concerned with inflicting punishment than with creating the conditions in which the group will discipline itself.

10. The leader listens.

11. The leader knows himself.

By acting according to these principles, the teacher was able to lead the group through the many dimensions of classroom life. His leadership skill was a major variable in developing the group initially, and in restoring the group's stability when required.

Displaying a style of teaching. The fifth distinctive element of the teacher's perspective can be characterized as a partiuclar style of teaching. This teacher stated that he knew his students and was aware of their needs. That is why he developed group activities and reiterated the goals of respect for each other and cooperation, he explained. He was courteous to his students and other people with whom he interacted, thus giving the students a direct model of behaviors which reflected respect.

Because the teacher developed personal relationships with his students and came to know each one individually, he was better able to plan for them and order the events of the day and the year. He indicated that he was proud of teaching and enjoyed being in the group. He felt that

teaching should center around the student, so he was very independent of outside elements. He said he knew what was best for his students and acted on that basis; he thought that those who didn't know the students as he did could not be expected to teach them as he did. His desire for organization and order and his ability to plan well kept the routine activities of the day functioning smoothly. Instruction proceeded, normal and special activities took place, and the students accomplished a variety of tasks.

The teacher was a charismatic individual who had a dramatic approach to teaching. He was skilled in drama and theatrics and carried his skills into the classroom, as evidenced by the dramatic nature of many of the class activities: the plays, the programs, and creative dramatics, for example. Another feature of the teacher's style was his ability to joke with the students, laugh with them, and reply to them with humor when the occasion called for it. The class responded favorably to his style; indeed, his leadership in the group appeared to be a natural outgrowth of the type person he was. Thus, once again there seems to be a connection among different elements of the teacher's perspective, in this case, his teaching style and his ability to lead. As illustrated, his leadership qualities helped maintain group stability, which, in turn, furthered the classroom goals of respect and cooperation.

Contextual Variables Influencing the Perspective

The teacher's classroom perspective was strongly influenced by two external variables, his interaction with the principal and his interaction with the reading center specialist. Each was marked by conflict to some extent, partly because the teacher expected a high degree of organization and planning from these people since he, himself, was so adept at these processes. While these interactions were characterized by conflict, however, they did aid in keeping the group together. When experiencing frustrations with the principal and specialist, the teacher would turn to his own group for support, organization, and cooperation (elements which he felt were somewhat lacking in his relationship with the reading specialist and the principal). Because the students respected and trusted the teacher, they sympathized with him and reinforced the perspective of groupness by offering their support. Moreover, the students' trust and respect for the teacher increased as they experienced problems with people outside the classroom group. The students felt they were involved in the teacher's problems, because he openly told them when he was upset about something and why. Thus the principal and reading center specialist indirectly contributed to the development of groupness.

Inside the classroom, many variables affected the

teacher's classroom perspective. A critical influence was the individual student as a person. The teacher was aware of the students' various home situation and intended to provide a classroom which offered some of the things that were not adequately provided at home. In many of the homes, for instance, there was no recognizable adult leader, so the teacher became a central adult figure. In some homes, the students experienced unhappy events and were berated or abused; consequently the teacher provided activities which gave the students the chance to have fun and to learn something as well. Plays, field trips, projects, group classwork, and simply the sense of belonging to a group helped counter some of the students' negative home experiences.

Another important variable which influenced the teacher's perspective was (obvious as it might sound) the teacher, himself. His talents as a dramatist and performer enabled him to plan certain activities which brought the group together. His own belief system, which concentrated on respect for persons and cooperation with persons, found its way into the class as a major classroom goal. His personal qualities, which made him an effective leader, helped to promote an effective group. And finally, his involvement in organization outside the classroom, such as the district's helping teachers group or the art teachers' association,

helped him create, maintain, and restore the group by bringing him back to his own classroom for rewards.

A third variable influencing the teacher's classroom perspective was the classroom teaching team. With two other adults in the room, he was able to plan many group activities, and small group activities were readily manageable. In addition, the team members viewed the teacher as the leader, giving students an example to follow. Both the aide and intern worked most frequently as facilitators of some group endeavor while the teacher worked as leader and instructor of the class; this made it clear to the students who the group leader was.

The Teacher's Assumptions about Classrooms, Students, and Learning

This teacher maintained that the classroom ought to provide students with those things which were absent or minimal in their own homes. Having spent nine of his ten years as a teacher in an urban school, he had developed an understanding of the students' backgrounds and some of their needs. Based on his observations, he came to view his role as "mother and father" to some of his students. More accurately, he felt he should be an adult leader figure or role model for many of his students.

By providing leadership, the teacher was able to be

fair in giving himself to the group. Had he concentrated too intently on individuals, he would have run the risk of being accused of favoritism, but by maintaining a leadership position, he was able to make himself equally available to his students and still show interest in them as individuals

Over the course of the year, it became evident that the teacher considered his goals of respect and cooperation as critical to the students' long-range development. He believed that if the respect and cooperation practiced in the home were minimal, the student had to experience these qualities in school. The teacher based much of his curriculum on this assumption; that is why he articulated goals of maturity, self-reliance, independence, respect, and cooperation over and above other traditional classroom goals.

The teacher did not neglect instructional goals, but rather, he viewed them as important in relation to the major class goals of respect and cooperation. He felt that before he could begin to work on science, reading, or social studies, he had to deal with the emotional or physical problems facing him and his individual students. Students who were victims of child abuse, lack of adult guidance, emotional problems, and the like were viewed first as individuals needing exposure to respect and cooperation, then as students needing help in science or reading or social studies or whatever.

The teacher's assumptions about his students supported a group perspective. The student became a member of his or her own group, equal before his group, without any overt ties to his or her background. He or she learned respect and cooperation within the framework of the group as a member of the group and took on responsibilities. The student learned curricular items, such as fractions, South America, treble clefs, and synonyms through the group activities which, in turn, reinforced the goals of respect and cooperation.

Teacher Synthesis of Information into His Perspective

As previously stated, this teacher's perspective was marked by a concern for creating and maintaining a group. As also stated, the teacher took into consideration his students' backgrounds and behavior when orchestrating group development. He synthesized this information into his perspective through the process of self-indication. As Blumer (1969) and other interactionists have explained, individuals piece together and guide their actions by considering different things and interpreting their significance for prospective action.

This teacher guided his actions by interpreting student background and behavior in reference to the group. The teacher was aware that the backgrounds of some class members

were such that the classroom goals of peer cooperation and personal respect would be minimally practiced in the home. Since the teacher believed cooperation and respect were critical, he quite naturally constructed an environment which reinforced these concepts.

The group's stability was threatened during an eight-week period when the teacher removed himself from the class for half the day each school day. Since November, the teacher's actions and statements had helped build a set of norms which the group accepted and which guided its behavior. Usually, his presence was enough to maintain group behavioral norms; when it was not, a look or a few words sufficed. Based on this evidence, he assumed that his temporary absence would not make a big difference in terms of the norms the students followed. He was confident that any qualified substitute teacher would find the group as cooperative as he had.

To understand the teacher's interpretation of this matter, it is necessary to recall some of the components of group life. In the first place, the teacher provided rewards for his group. Blau (1964) wrote about the attainment of rewards as incentive for continued social interaction. Rewards in this classroom promoted two types of responses by the group members: (1) protection of the relationship which has proved rewarding (the students

protected their membership in the group and their relationship with the teacher); and (2) feelings of obligation to offer something in return to the group (students reciprocated by following the norms of the group and by keeping up their individual relationships with the teacher and each other). Taking these reactions into account, it is easy to see why the teacher assumed that the students' behavior would remain at some level of stability.

On the other hand, one of the components of group life is leadership. This teacher provided effective leadership for his students through the first phase of the group's development. During the second phase of the group's development, however, there was a leadership problem because he was present only half of the time. The reward system changed, and some rewards were totally absent. As a result, the students felt less inclined to protect their group affiliation and less obligated to offer something in return. The shift in leadership also created a sense of frustration, and group consensus dropped to a low level. Cohesiveness and stability were not as apparent in this phase of group development as they had been earlier.

During the next phase, the teacher attempted to lead the group back to a more stable and cohesive level by planning a variety of cooperative projects and programs for the entire school day. He interpreted the events of

the classroom goals of cooperation and respect. The planned instruction and activities helped the class move toward its goals; the group process, which promoted the concepts of working together and respecting others, was reinforced through instruction, class activities, and classroom management. The teacher's efforts to stabilize the group were successful. The group members became reaffiliated, followed the norms of the group, and felt obligated to offer something to the group. These factors, in turn, enabled the teacher and the group to attain their goals of cooperation and respect.

Curricular Implications

This study was an attempt to understand one teacher's perspective by learning how he makes sense of his classroom. Given the need for descriptive data on teaching, a study of one teacher, in depth over an extended length of time, seemed most appropriate. Because only one teacher in one classroom, was involved, however, caution is urged in drawing implications from the study. It would be inappropriate to generalize from this particular case to the entire world of teaching; it does seem possible, however, to formulate some conclusions that relate to teachers, teacher educators, and prospective teachers.

The teacher in this study worked at developing a

sense of groupness and thereby achieved his classroom goals. This seems to point toward major conclusions. First, the teacher was successful because he developed a strong group, community, or as Tonnies (1957) labeled it, *gemeinschaft*; consequently, it appears that in order to be successful, teachers must try to develop a strong group or *gemeinschaft*. Second, the study appears to indicate that the classroom which operates as a *gemeinschaft* is insulated by its nature as a community, and is not easily manipulated by forces outside the community.[3]

---

[3]To fully understand what is meant by *gemeinschaft*, it is necessary to understand the commonly-held characteristics of *gemeinschaft* and its opposite type, *gesellschaft*. Tonnies (1957) separated society into these two types: *gemeinschaft* (community) and *gesellschaft* (society). All private, exclusive and face-to-face interaction is understood as *gemeinschaft* or community. All public life, that is, society itself, is understood as *gesellschaft*. *Gemeinschaft* is often compared to a family, while *gesellschaft* is comparable to the corporate state. The characteristics of *gemeinschaft* include: (1) a natural, unforced association, (2) a family mentality, (3) a conscious collective, (4) face-to-face interactions, (5) unspecialized activities, (6) group means and ends that are bound up and often indistinguishable, (7) a small number of individuals as members, (8) modes of sympathy and identification, (9) a resistance to and a check on change, and (10) a differential status for community members.

On the other hand, in a *gesellschaft*, the characteristics include (1) forced or unnatural associations, (2) absence of a family mentality, with emphasis on contracts, reciprocity, and rights of individuals, (3) absence of a conscious collective, (4) impersonal interactions, (5) highly specialized activities, (6) clearly delineated

In this case study, the teacher and the group exhibited all the characteristics of a small, communal family. Cooperative activities were the norm in the class, whether in the realm of instruction, recess, field trips, or programs. Throughout the year, the group members were sympathetic toward one another, identified with one another, and established constraints upon themselves from within. In addition, their reliance on the teacher was clearly like the reliance of family members on a family leader.

The students, by virtue of their groupness, were not easily influenced by outside incidents. Forces outside the immediate group actually worked to solidify the sense of groupness (as evidenced in the conflicts with the principal and the reading specialist). The students enjoyed a differential status because of the group endeavors they participated in.

Lortie (1975) has claimed that teachers view teaching as an individual enterprise and that they dislike interruptions. If the classroom is viewed as a community or family, this individualism makes sense. The teacher is

---

means and ends of the group, (7) many individuals as members, (8) modes of rationality and non-emotionalism, (9) view of change as progress and highly values, and (10) equal treatment for everyone within status levels.

most likely to know his or her students best and to know what is best for them. Outside forces would, therefore, have minimal effects, simply because they fall outside the realm of the *gemeinschaft*. This teacher, for example, chose to ignore the management-by-objectives system in reading because it "didn't make any sense for his students." He selected those math objectives which he felt *did* make sense for the students.

Jackson (1968) has asked if the teacher's primary concern is learning after all. In this study, learning was a concern of the teacher's, but the *primary* concern was establishing the group, the community, the *gemeinschaft*. I would conclude that the teacher was successful in getting students to learn *because* he developed a group.

All of these observations suggest that by identifying a teacher's classroom perspective, it is possible to determine the teacher's approach to the classroom curriculum. In this study, the teacher's group perspective dominated the day-to-day decisions and classroom activities. Outside influences, such as a district-mandated management-by-objectives system in reading and math, intervention by the principal or other staff members, and directives from parents had *Little or No Effect* on the classroom curriculum. The classroom curriculum was group-centered and carried out by the group, with the teacher as leader.

This lends support to the notion that teaching remains an individual enterprise dealing with present-oriented situations in the classroom. In this case study, the teacher's classroom perspective was, essentially, the curriculum of the classroom.

REFERENCES

Becker, Howard S., Geer, Blanche and Hughes, Everett C. Making the Grade: The Academic Side of College Life. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1968.

Blau, P. Exchange and Power in Social Life. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964.

Blumer, H. Symbolic Interaction: Perspective and Method. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969.

Homans, G.C. The Human Group. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1950.

Jackson, P. Life in Classrooms. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1968.

Lortie, D.C. Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975.

Meltzer, B.N., Petras, J., & Reynolds, L.T. Symbolic Interactionism, Genesis, Varieties and Criticism. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975.

Moore, G. Alexander Jr. Realities of the Urban Classroom. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1967.

Newell, A., Shaw, J.C., & Simon, H.A. Elements of a Theory of Human Problem Solving. Psychological Review, 1958, 64, 151-166.

Newell, A., & Simon, H.A. Human Problem Solving. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972.

Shibutani, T. Reference Groups as Perspectives. In J.G. Manis & B.N. Meltzer (Eds.), Symbolic interaction: A reader in social psychology. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1967.

Shulman, L.S. The psychology of school subjects: A premature obituary? Journal of Research on Science Teaching, 1974, 11, 319-339.

Smith, Louis M. and Geoffrey, William. The Complexities of an Urban Classroom. Chicago: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1968.

Tonnies, F. Community and society (Gemeinschaft and gesellschaft). (C.P. Loomis, Ed. and trans.). East Lansing, Mich.: The Michigan State University Press, 1957.

Wolcott, Harry F. The Man in the Principal's Office: an Ethnography. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1973.